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Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

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Chapter I
Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to General Assembly resolution 48/141 of 20 December 1993 and should be read in conjunction with the High Commissioner's reports to the Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fifth session (E/CN.4/1999/9) and to the Economic and Social Council at its substantive session of 1999 (E/1999/96). The present report combines an overview of the main activities of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights for the promotion and protection of human rights with information on a number of specific issues requiring focussed attention.

Chapter II
Widespread violations of human rights

2. Widespread violations of human rights, particularly in situations of conflict, have been a tragic characteristic of this past year. Terrible atrocities and human rights abuses have continued to disfigure this world, repeating the vicious cycle of inhumanity that gripped Rwanda and Cambodia and blatantly flouting the pledge of the international community that such acts would never happen again.

Kosovo

3. The situation of human rights in Kosovo has been of concern to the international community for most of this decade. In 1993, the Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the former Yugoslavia stated that the situation of human rights had been continually worsening since Kosovo lost its status as an autonomous province in July 1990. Before violence erupted on a massive scale in mid-1998, the main human rights issues for the Kosovar Albanians concerned their mass dismissal from the public sector, police brutality, the lack of freedom of the media and problems concerning education. The Albanian population endured various forms of discrimination as a result of new laws adopted by the Republic of Serbia. The economic situation deteriorated to the extent that even the subsistence of many Albanian families was threatened.

4. Early in 1999, and particularly during the air campaign by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a large number of Kosovar Albanians fled the country, bringing with them appalling stories of persecution, executions, rape, evictions, displacement and destruction. Following the massive exodus of Albanians from Kosovo, the Commission on Human Rights, in resolution 1999/2 of 13 April 1999, requested the High Commissioner to report to it urgently on the situation of human rights and the humanitarian crisis relating to Kosovo and on the implementation of the provisions of the resolution. In response to this resolution, the High Commissioner submitted to the Commission weekly reports on the situation of human rights in Kosovo. She had already appointed a personal representative, and had requested him and the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights to travel to the region with a view to obtaining accurate information on the human rights situation.

5. In May 1999 the High Commissioner herself undertook a mission to assess the situation and visited the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and both Serbia and Montenegro.

6. On 10 June 1999, following confirmation by NATO of the withdrawal of security forces of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from Kosovo and the subsequent suspension of NATO air operations against the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and in light of the return of refugees to Kosovo, staff members of the human rights office in the Federal Republic returned to Kosovo with the advance team of the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK).

7. In the weeks that followed, members of ethnic minority groups, especially Roma and Serbs, began fleeing Kosovo owing to fear of the killings, kidnapping, looting of properties, evictions, widespread burning of villages, as well as cultural, historical and religious monuments, and other forms of intimidation directed against them. The situation of the Serb, Roma and other minority communities has been a painful one of widespread human rights violations.

8. The Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights has reopened its offices in Pristina, Belgrade and Podgorica. In Kosovo, building on its countrywide mandate and on long-standing experience in the area, the Office is carrying out the following tasks: following up on information-gathering that had begun in Albania, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro; sharing information, by means of the database of the Office of the High Commissioner, with the United Nations human rights mechanisms for follow-up action; maintaining institutional representation in bodies advising on the re-establishment of the judiciary in Kosovo; maintaining institutional representation in the Task Force on Minority Issues with responsibility for assessing the situation in the field and devising protection response mechanisms and legal regulatory policies; gathering information, in cooperation with the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), on circumstances of arrest of prisoners transferred to Serbia

for follow-up outside Kosovo; gathering information, in cooperation with the international security force in Kosovo (KFOR), UNMIK, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and ICRC, on persons kidnapped in Kosovo by Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA) police and military police and other non-State actors; participating in the subcommission of the Kosovo Transitional Council on detainees and prisoners; liaising with human rights non-governmental organizations; and cooperating with OSCE on the possible establishment of an ombudsman's office.

9. A senior human rights adviser in the office of the Special Representative of the Secretary-General was appointed in mid-August and, in Geneva, the office of the High Commissioner has continued to play a coordinating role, working with other organizations concerned with the human rights situation in Kosovo.

10. On 30 June 1999, the High Commissioner travelled to Pristina and, on 7 September 1999, presented a further report on the situation of human rights in Kosovo to the Bureau of the Commission on Human Rights.

11. The situation of human rights in Kosovo is still a matter of great concern and special attention must be given to the protection of all communities and the establishment of a civil society based on the rule of law and respect for human rights. The effective prosecution of those responsible for human rights violations is crucial and full support must be given to the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

12. It is important to stress that long-term strategies for the promotion and protection of human rights in the Balkan region and improved coordination among international actors to promote a culture of peace are critical to sustained respect for human rights in this troubled region. Attention should be given to the situation of human rights in the Republics of Serbia and Montenegro to prevent outbreaks of violence and to strengthen democracy in the region.

Sierra Leone

13. The situation of human rights in Sierra Leone has been extremely serious. The number of deaths may never be known, and there are no accurate figures for those who have been deliberately maimed. Certain figures do exist: 4,000 people have been hospitalized with amputation wounds, 50 per cent of them women. It is estimated that for every person hospitalized, four others suffered severe injuries but did not get hospital treatment. In January 1999, between 5,000 and 7,000 people were killed in Freetown alone. Ninety per cent of the property in the capital has been destroyed. An astonishing feature of the conflict in Sierra Leone is the deliberate targeting of children for murder and maiming.

14. The High Commissioner visited Sierra Leone on 24 and 25 June 1999. She was accompanied by a delegation which included the former President of Botswana, Ketumile Masire, Ambassador Catherine von Heidenstam of Sweden, Ambassador Kemal Morjane of Tunisia and Gay McDougall of the United States of America. During the visit, the High Commissioner signed, with President Kabbah and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General a Human Rights Manifesto, intended to provide support to the peace process. The Manifesto encouraged the promotion and the protection of human rights, and drew attention to the plight of women and children and to the need for the demobilization of combatants under the age of 18 years and their rehabilitation and reintegration into society as critical elements for the return to normalcy. The High Commissioner expressed her full support for the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a proposal contained in the Human Rights Manifesto, and a renewed national Human Rights Commission, and proposed the establishment of a United Nations commission of inquiry to investigate and assess human rights and humanitarian law violations perpetrated by all parties since the commencement of the conflict in 1991. The High Commissioner's Special Adviser for national institutions and two experts on reconciliation commissions travelled to Sierra Leone in order to assess the situation and provide recommendations for future action. Bearing in mind the results of these missions, the priorities of the Office of the High Commissioner include the speedy establishment of a truth and reconciliation commission and a national human rights commission. A consultant is examining the relationship between a truth and reconciliation commission and a future international commission of inquiry into violations amounting to crimes against humanity.

East Timor

15. As the results of the referendum of 30 August 1999 in East Timor became known, the situation in the territory deteriorated rapidly. Reports of very serious and widespread violations of human rights were received from United Nations personnel on the ground. They included large-scale killings, forced displacement of individuals and destruction of homes and property. There was clear evidence of collusion between elements of the security forces and the militia to deport East Timorese forcibly to West Timor and elsewhere with the purpose of terrorizing the populations through the most gruesome abuses of their fundamental

rights. Human rights defenders were being specifically targeted.

16. On 3 September 1999, the High Commissioner called for increased international action to protect the people of the territory and expressed grave concern about the fate of the thousands of East Timorese whose whereabouts were unknown after they were attacked by militiamen and soldiers while seeking refuge in the headquarters of the United Nations Assistance Mission in East Timor (UNAMET), the compound of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the home of Bishop Carlos Belo.

17. In response to the deteriorating human rights situation, the High Commissioner urged the Commission on Human Rights to consider holding a special session on the situation. From 11 to 13 September, she visited the area to carry out a first-hand assessment of the human rights situation in East Timor. In Darwin, Australia, the High Commissioner met East Timorese refugees and the staff of UNAMET who had been evacuated from the territory. In Jakarta, the High Commissioner met the President of Indonesia and the East Timorese leader Xanana Gusmão. The High Commissioner welcomed the decision of the Government of Indonesia to accept a United Nations peacekeeping force, and urged that an international committee of inquiry be set up to gather and analyse evidence concerning the events in East Timor in order to make recommendations on how to establish accountability for human rights violations.

18. Reports of violations of human rights in East Timor, including numerous killings, widespread torture, thousands of disappearances and the forced displacement of some 200,000 people have been received by the relevant special procedures mechanisms. As a result, the Chairman-Rapporteur of the Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, the Representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and the Special Rapporteur on the question of torture called upon the Government of Indonesia to ensure the right not to be arbitrarily displaced and that the rights to life and to physical and mental integrity of the East Timorese people were protected.

Civilians in armed conflict

19. The High Commissioner addressed members of the Security Council on 16 September, on the occasion of the presentation of the report of the Secretary-General on civilians in armed conflict (S/1999/957). Referring to the grave violations of human rights in Kosovo, Sierra Leone, East Timor and in many other conflicts, the High Commissioner noted that civilians were not just casualties but were increasingly regarded as instruments of war, which was an appalling abuse of their most basic human rights. She supported the report's call for States to ratify all of the international instruments in the field of human rights, humanitarian and refugee law, to withdraw reservations and, most importantly, to comply fully with their provisions. She said that the best protection for civilians in armed conflicts was prevention and urged that the root causes of conflict be addressed and efforts made to defuse tensions so that atrocities and violations of fundamental rights committed during armed conflicts might be prevented.

Chapter III
Implementation and protection of human rights

A. International human rights treaties

20. The international human rights treaties are the sources of the universal, indivisible, interrelated and interdependent human rights norms and principles which are at the centre of the activities of the Office of the High Commissioner. The six treaty bodies[1] examine the reports submitted periodically by States parties, consider complaints from individuals in the case of those treaties with a complaints procedure, formulate general comments or recommendations on specific treaty provisions and, in the case of two treaty bodies that have established this practice, hold days of general discussion on specific topics or treaty provisions. They have also begun to increase information exchange and coordination with each other, with other human rights mechanisms and with their external partners.

21. At their most recent annual meeting, the chairpersons of the treaty bodies engaged in a direct exchange with participants at the annual meeting of the special procedures, an occasion which both found to be useful and which they agreed to continue. Since 1998, the chairpersons have also met representatives of governments to learn the perspectives of States parties on the functioning of the system.

22. The High Commissioner, with the active support of the Secretary-General, seeks to achieve universal ratification of the six main human rights treaties by 2003. It is encouraging to report that there has been steady progress in the area of ratifications, although it is slower than is desired. All States Members of the United Nations have ratified one or more of the treaties and are encouraged to ratify the others. Special note also needs to be taken of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families which, as at 30 August 1999, had

been ratified or acceded to by only 12 States and had not yet entered into force, for which 20 ratifications are necessary. The Convention addresses the increasingly important phenomenon of persons working outside their countries of origin or permanent residence who are vulnerable to abuses.

23. It is a matter of concern that certain States have denounced or reduced their acceptance of the Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, thereby depriving their citizens or persons under their jurisdiction of the protection of an important human rights procedure.

24. The treaty bodies are endeavouring to maximize their efficiency by improving their methods of work in the light of their increasing workloads. The situation has led five of the treaty bodies to seek additional resources through plans of action and appeals for voluntary contributions.

25. Strengthening of the treaty system is also a priority of the Office of the High Commissioner. In 1999, the Office has adopted a strategy to build a solid base of support for the treaty bodies, alongside one for the extra-conventional mechanisms, both from the regular budget of the United Nations and through voluntary contributions. In December 1998, an academic study of the human rights treaty system was launched, with the collaboration of the Office. The study will have two dimensions: the first involves an assessment of the capacities, accomplishments and needs of all treaty bodies, and the second involves a series of concrete case studies which will examine and identify the impact of the human rights treaties within States in terms of ratification, administration and enforcement. The study will formulate concrete recommendations for improving implementation strategies for the human rights treaties.

B. Special procedures

26. The Commission on Human Rights, the Economic and Social Council and the General Assembly have established a number of special procedures to deal with allegations of human rights violations. They examine, review and publicly report on major phenomena of human rights violations throughout the world (known as thematic mandates) or on human rights situations in specific countries or territories (country mandates). Currently, there are 21 thematic mandates and 14 country mandates.

27. The thematic mandates cover extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions; enforced involuntary disappearances; torture; arbitrary detention; restitution for victims of grave violations of human rights; the independence of judges and lawyers; freedom of opinion and expression; mercenaries; contemporary forms of racism and xenophobia; religious intolerance; sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography; children in armed conflict; violence against women; internally displaced persons; the rights of migrants; and illicit moving and dumping of toxic wastes. In 1998, a total of 25 countries were visited under thematic mandates and, in 1999, some 16 visits have so far been completed and an additional 5 have been approved and are to be completed by the end of the year.

28. In addition, the Commission on Human Rights has established special procedures mandates covering economic and social rights and the right to development, including the appointment of an independent expert on structural adjustment policies, special rapporteurs on the right to education and on foreign debt, and independent experts on extreme poverty and the right to development.

29. The country mandates cover: Afghanistan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, Burundi, Cambodia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Iran (Islamic Republic of), Iraq, Myanmar, Rwanda, Somalia, the Sudan and the Palestinian territories occupied since 1967. One or more fact-finding missions have been undertaken to each of the aforementioned countries over the past year, with the exception of Iraq, the Islamic Republic of Iran and Myanmar, which did not accept a visit.

30. A number of steps have been taken to help improve the special procedures. The Office of the High Commissioner commissioned a study by two experts[2] on ways and means of increasing the effectiveness of special procedures (see E/CN.4/2000/5, sect. III). The study, which was completed in June 1999, found that since the convening of the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, the number of special procedures had grown substantially, to over 30, with no corresponding increase in the human and financial resources to support them. In addition, the creation of the Office of United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights had led to increased expectations of victims that the United Nations could respond to their plights. Furthermore, demands on the Office had multiplied since the Secretary-General's reform initiative to mainstream human rights into the four substantive areas of the Organization's work programme. Taken together, the system is now experiencing real difficulties in responding properly to the concerns of victims of human rights violations because it is so chronically under-resourced.

31. The study recommends that the Office of the High Commissioner strengthen the analytical, communications, information and logistical assistance it provides to the

special procedures and address five interrelated areas: improving the effectiveness of urgent actions; developing a more effective response to emergencies; improving the methods of follow-up; increasing the support provided to the experts by means of additional human resources; and developing an electronic database.

32. The Office of the High Commissioner is implementing a number of recommendations that have no costs. Implementing the following recommendations will require additional funding and will enable the establishment or enhancement of:

(a) A central quick response desk to receive and process complaints from victims and requests for urgent action with a view to enabling special procedures to respond more quickly to threats of human rights violations or to current violations;

(b) An in-house emergency response task force to ensure swift and coordinated action by special procedures to emergency situations. The task force will also link with other United Nations entities to ensure better interaction with the special procedures system;

(c) The analytical capacity at the disposal of special procedures through the out-sourcing of studies;

(d) Administrative support to provide logistical backstopping to special procedures;

(e) Information technology made available in the form of a database and an electronic information tracking system, as well as an electronic mail network to link the special rapporteurs.

33. The annual meeting of special rapporteurs/representatives, experts and chairpersons of working groups of the special procedures was held at Geneva from 31 May to 3 June 1999, and dealt with how to improve the effectiveness of their activities. The conclusions are contained in the annex to document E/CN.4/2000/5. The Bureau of the fifty-fourth session of the Commission on Human Rights made extensive recommendations on the system of special procedures in its report of 23 December 1998 (E/CN.4/1999/104). Based on that report, the Commission decided to establish an inter-sessional open-ended working group to continue, *inter alia*, to examine the Bureau's report. The working group will meet three times before the fifty-sixth session of the Commission and will present a report and its recommendations to the Commission at that time.

C. Human rights defenders

34. Since the adoption by the General Assembly in December 1998 of the Declaration on the Right and Responsibility of Individuals, Groups and Organs of Society to Promote and Protect Universally Recognized Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (also known as the Declaration on Human Rights Defenders), the Office of the High Commissioner and the special procedures of the Commission on Human Rights have devoted increased attention to the question of protection of human rights defenders. Allegations about the persecution, harassment, detention, ill-treatment and sometimes arbitrary killing of human rights defenders have been given particular attention by a number of thematic and geographic special procedures mandates.

35. In the context of the events in Kosovo and East Timor, the precarious situation of human rights defenders has been monitored with particular attention. The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention has expressed its serious concern over the treatment of human rights advocates by the military-backed militia in East Timor. The High Commissioner condemned the assassination of Sri Lankan parliamentarian and human rights defender Neelan Trivulchevan in Colombo on 29 July 1999. Several special rapporteurs and independent experts of the Commission have addressed urgent appeals to several Governments expressing concern over the harassment, detention or ill-treatment of human rights defenders.

D. Human rights field presences

36. The involvement of the Office of the High Commissioner in field work has increased significantly in the past few years, with the number of field presences growing from 1 in 1992 to 19 in 1999. The nature and format of the field presences of the Office have varied considerably over time. Currently, there are 8 field presences carrying out promotional, protection and technical cooperation activities in Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Cambodia, Colombia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Afghanistan. There are 11 field presences carrying out technical cooperation activities in Uganda, South Africa, southern Africa, Togo, Gaza, Indonesia, Mongolia, Guatemala, El Salvador, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Azerbaijan.

37. In addition to the field presences of the Office of the High Commissioner, there are six field presences operated jointly by the Office with the Department of Peacekeeping

Operations and with the Department of Political Affairs. These are in Angola, the Central African Republic, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Abkhazia, Georgia. These presences are integral parts of the respective peacekeeping/peace-building operations and are funded and administratively managed by the respective Department. The Office of the High Commissioner is responsible for identifying the human rights staff and providing ongoing substantive support. These presences report regularly on the human rights situation and on their activities.

38. In order to improve support to field presences, the Office has: developed cooperative arrangements with other parts of the United Nations system, intergovernmental organizations, and international and national non-governmental organizations and training institutes; consolidated human rights monitoring methodology for use by field officers of the Office in a manual on human rights monitoring; established a field methodology and advisory services team within the Office; and increased emphasis on effective procedures to secure qualified staff and the training of field officers.

39. The Office is also developing and consolidating its policies, strategies and methodologies to enhance the effectiveness of work in the field, incorporating past and current experiences into future actions and avoiding an ad hoc approach to the establishment and management of field operations. The second meeting of field presences was held at Geneva, from 31 August to 3 September 1999. Participants at the meeting discussed policy, and organizational and methodological issues related to all field presences, and experiences were exchanged between the field presences and staff at Geneva. Participants also identified common challenges and issues, and considered ways and means to address them. The Office is also integrating the support of field presences into its overall structure and goals so as to ensure a consistent representation of policy across all offices.

E. Technical cooperation in the field of human rights

40. The purpose of the technical cooperation programme is to assist countries in promoting and protecting all human rights at the national and regional levels, through the incorporation of international human rights standards in national laws, policies and practices and by building sustainable national capacity to implement these standards and ensure respect for human rights.

41. Technical cooperation programme components include: development of national plans of action for human rights; assistance for legislative reform; electoral assistance; support to national human rights institutions established in keeping with the Paris Principles; assistance in the areas of the administration of justice, the military, the police, parliaments and treaty reporting; human rights education, information and documentation; strengthening of non-governmental organizations; promotion of economic, social and cultural rights; and rights of women. The assistance is based on an assessment of domestic human rights needs, and takes the form of expert advisory services, training courses, workshops and seminars, fellowships, grants, and the provision of information and documentation. The participation of all elements of national society, including civil society, national institutions, and the judicial, legislative and executive branches of Government is sought in formulating and implementing projects.

42. The programme is funded mainly through the United Nations Voluntary Fund for Technical Cooperation in the Field of Human Rights. Contributions in 1998 amounted to some US$ 10 million from countries in all regions of the world. The number of activities, carried out at the request of the concerned Government, have been rapidly increasing over the past years. At present, there are 50 ongoing technical cooperation projects: 8 at the global level, 9 at the regional level and 33 at the national level. Geographically, 14 are being carried out in Africa, 9 in the Asian-Pacific region, 9 in Central and Eastern Europe, 2 in Arab States and 8 in the Latin American and Caribbean region.

43. Positive experiences have been gained with a regional approach which stimulates intergovernmental cooperation, provides a forum for the exchange of experience and promotion of best practices among countries in comparable situations, and leads to the design of common policies and programmes. The aim is to develop regional strategies that would influence the technical cooperation programme.

44. Enhanced collaboration with other United Nations actors is being pursued in the implementation of technical cooperation activities, with a view to maximizing their impact and the use of resources. Close cooperation in the formulation and implementation of projects is particularly significant with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

45. A study of technical cooperation for human rights across the United Nations system, carried out by the Office in cooperation with other agencies, showed that the interest of Member States in human rights technical assistance continues to increase as does the number of agencies and programmes offering human rights-related assistance. The

study concluded that a system-wide response was required to ensure a consistent approach to human rights throughout the United Nations system and that cooperation and coordination should be strengthened at headquarters, regional and country levels. The Office has organized inter-agency consultations at Geneva for that purpose and is planning to convene a regional workshop at the end of 1999 to follow up the study's recommendations.

1. National human rights action plans

46. The World Conference on Human Rights recommended that States consider adopting national plans of action for human rights. Such plans can play a key role in incorporating international human rights standards at the national level and can provide an effective strategy for the advancement of human rights. They reflect a willingness on the part of countries to translate into concrete action their commitment to the full enjoyment of human rights. The following States are in the process of adopting or implementing such national plans: Australia, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, Indonesia, Latvia, Malawi, Mexico, the Philippines, South Africa and Venezuela.

47. The Office is facilitating information-sharing with States, national institutions and non-governmental organizations in order to identify best practices in connection with the development of national plans of action for human rights. The first regional workshop for the Asian-Pacific region was held at Bangkok from 5 to 7 July 1999. Agreement was reached on a list of possible elements to be considered by Governments in developing national plans, which set out general principles, purposes and a step-by-step strategy for the elaboration of such a plan. Preparations for further regional workshops in Latin America and Africa are under way. Technical cooperation projects are also being developed and implemented at the national level. To strengthen these initiatives, the Office is developing a handbook on developing national plans of action for human rights.

48. The General Assembly, within the framework of the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, has adopted guidelines for the national plans of action for human rights education (A/52/469/Add.1 and Add.1/Corr.1). Such plans should constitute an integral part of the overall national plan of action for human rights. Many of the principles and strategies in the education guidelines are equally relevant and applicable to the preparation of an overall human rights plan.

2. National institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights

49. The Office continues to assign high priority to building national capacity for the promotion and protection of all human rights through assistance for the establishment and strengthening of independent and effective national institutions, in accordance with the Paris Principles.

50. During 1998, an evaluation of the work of the Office of the High Commissioner in the area of national institutions highlighted the necessity of strengthening overall capacity in line with the rapidly growing number of requests from Member States for assistance in establishing new national institutions or strengthening existing ones. It was also important to continue to provide support to international and regional conferences and meetings of national institutions.[3]

51. The Office is increasing its efforts to meet all outstanding requests for assistance from individual countries and new institutions, and seeking to increase effective coordination with other international agencies and regional and international organizations of national institutions in order to ensure that there is no duplication of effort. The development of a comprehensive database to facilitate sharing of best practices and accessibility of information, particularly to new institutions, will be accelerated.

Chapter IV
Regional cooperation on human rights

52. The development of regional cooperation for the promotion and protection of human rights is important, and the Office assigns priority to projects of technical cooperation at the national level that reflect or are part of a wider human rights regional cooperation strategy. Such a strategy was developed in the Framework for Regional Technical Cooperation in the Asian and Pacific region, adopted at Tehran in 1998 (E/CN.4/1998/50, annex II). That Framework identified four pillars of human rights action in Asia and the Pacific: the development of national plans of action for human rights; the enhancement and strengthening of national human rights institutions; human rights education; and strategies for the promotion of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development.

53. To carry out the strategy, agreement was reached earlier in 1999 on a number of regional initiatives in the Asian and Pacific region, including an inter-sessional workshop on national action plans for human rights, which was held in Thailand in July 1999. Other activities are

planned for the end of 1999 or early 2000: in the Republic of Korea, on human rights education for north-east Asia; in Japan, on the same subject for the Asian-Pacific region; and in Yemen on economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development.

54. Another important component of facilitating the development of national human rights capacities within the context of clearly defined regional human rights strategies is the appointment of regional advisers who come from and are based in the region concerned. Former Chief Justice of India P. Bhagwati serves as regional adviser for the Asian-Pacific region.

55. The Office of the High Commissioner is ready to support the development of regional human rights strategies and frameworks of cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean and on the African continent, as well as in the Balkans and other subregions in the OSCE region. In Latin America and the Caribbean, a regional workshop is being planned for Quito later in 1999, which could lead to discussions on a regional human rights strategy for the countries in the region.

56. Protecting and promoting human rights in Africa continues to be a priority for the Office. The first Organization of African Unity (OAU) Ministerial Conference on Human Rights in Africa, which was held in Mauritius in April 1999, and the Grand Bay Declaration and Plan of Action which the Conference adopted demonstrate the commitment of African States to human rights. The Office supported the preparations for the Conference and the High Commissioner in her statement to the meeting pledged full support for the ongoing efforts in Africa to promote and protect human rights. The High Commissioner reiterated that pledge to the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government, which met in Algeria in July.

57. In consultation with Member States, the High Commissioner is pursuing regional and subregional activities in Africa. The Organization of African Unity and other organizations are key partners in this process. Following the adoption of the Grand Bay Declaration, the Office plans to convene a subregional workshop in the Gambia in order to build upon various ongoing initiatives by OAU in the field of human rights and provide a strategic framework for action by the Office at the regional and subregional levels. The Office will start consultations with African States in the near future on developing a framework for regional human rights cooperation in Africa that would be based on continued support by the Office to OAU regional and subregional initiatives, as well as on activities at the national level in the four areas referred to above.

58. In the OSCE region, the Office will concentrate on developing subregional human rights initiatives, for instance, in the Balkan countries, aimed at strengthening human rights capacities, developing national plans of action for human rights, establishing national human rights institutions and promoting human rights education and a culture of tolerance, primarily through more consistent and effective cooperation with regional organizations and institutions, such as the Council of Europe or OSCE. In June 1999, the High Commissioner visited the Russian Federation. During her visit she signed the largest-ever project of technical cooperation with the Russian Federation focusing on human rights education, and held meetings with governmental and non-governmental representatives to discuss human rights. In addition to Moscow, the High Commissioner visited the city of Saratov, in the Volga region.

Chapter V
Right to development and economic, social and cultural rights

59. The realization of economic, social and cultural rights and the right to development continues to be one of the main priorities of the Office of the High Commissioner. Inter-agency cooperation between the human rights programme and agencies and programmes involved in the Organization's development activities is essential.[4] Of relevance is the participation of the Office in the work of the United Nations Development Group on the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF); the implementation of the memorandum of understanding between the Office and UNDP; and the involvement of the Office in the proposal by the World Bank for a comprehensive development framework.

60. Within the UNDAF process, the Office, as Chair of the ad hoc Group on the Right to Development, established by the United Nations Development Group, has worked to integrate human rights references in the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and UNDAF guidelines. The latter were adopted in April 1999, and the United Nations Development Group has embarked on work to support United Nations country teams in implementing the guidelines on the ground. Within this framework, the Office and the ad hoc Group on the Right to Development are developing a training module on human rights for country teams implementing a CCA/UNDAF which should be ready by November 1999, together with good practice case studies of human rights activities at the country level, in order to provide practical guidance to country teams. In addition, within the context

of the Working Group on Common Indicators, established by the United Nations Development Group, the Office is developing civil and political rights indicators to complement the existing economic and social indicators.

61. The memorandum of understanding signed between OHCHR and UNDP on 4 March 1998 has given a new and structured impetus to the collaboration between the two organizations. The memorandum of understanding specifies cooperation on, *inter alia,* the implementation of the right to development; advocacy for ratification of human rights instruments and increased participation of UNDP in the work of treaty bodies and the Working Group on the Right to Development; joint action on technical cooperation in the field of human rights and on human rights decades; briefings, training and other support to UNDP country offices; and UNDP support to visiting human rights missions and mechanisms of the Commission on Human Rights.

62. The joint programme of UNDP and the Office of the High Commissioner for human rights strengthening is designed to promote the integration of a human rights-based approach into development work at the country level. The programme is aimed at testing guidelines and methodologies and identifying best practices and learning opportunities for UNDP and the Office in the development of national capacity for the promotion and protection of human rights and in the implementation of a human rights-based approach to UNDP development programming.

63. Training of UNDP staff to strengthen their capacity to integrate human rights into their programmes of work at the country level is under way. A UNDP training manual on human rights and programming is being finalized and the Management Development and Governance Division of UNDP, in collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner, is organizing a series of workshops to train UNDP staff and their national counterparts in human rights. The Office has prepared a document entitled "Information and guidelines for resident coordinators on human rights" which will enhance the understanding and awareness of resident coordinators as regards human rights issues and define their responsibilities as chief representatives of the United Nations system at the country level.

64. The Office has been invited to participate in the pilot phase of the Comprehensive Development Framework of the World Bank, in particular in those sectors of the matrix which cover human rights, such as good governance, the justice system, social safety nets, education and health. In December 1998, the High Commissioner met with 600 staff of the Bank in Washington, D.C., and has acknowledged the Bank's efforts to take increasingly into account human rights concerns, including the appointment of a director for gender affairs.

Right to food

65. The Office of the High Commissioner and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) convened in Rome on 18 and 19 November 1998 a follow-up consultation on the right to adequate food, in response to Commission on Human Rights resolution 1998/23. The consultation pursued discussions on the content and means of implementation of the rights related to adequate food, in order to provide the High Commissioner with a full set of recommendations concerning her response to the Plan of Action of the World Food Summit. From 8 to 15 April 1999, the Office hosted the twenty-sixth session of the Administrative Committee on Coordination Subcommittee on Nutrition, and organized on this occasion a symposium on the substance and politics of a human rights approach to food and nutrition policies and programmes. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights adopted its general comment 12 on the right to adequate food, which defines the content and the related obligations of the right to food under article 11 of the International Covenant.

Right to housing

66. An expert group meeting on practical aspects of the human right to adequate housing was convened jointly by the United Nations Centre for Human Settlements (Habitat) and the Office of the High Commissioner, from 9 to 11 May 1999. The group supported the initiative to formulate a housing rights programme aimed at the consolidation of all key principles linked to housing rights and also suggested that comprehensive human rights guidelines on development-based displacements be adopted. The development of joint pilot projects of technical cooperation on housing rights by the Centre and the Office was encouraged.

Poverty

67. The eradication of poverty has been priority objective of all the major United Nations conferences convened over the past five years. The first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty was proclaimed by the General Assembly for the period 1997-2006 and has for its theme "Eradicating poverty is an ethical, social, political and economic imperative of humankind". In 1998, the Commission on Human Rights appointed an independent expert on the question of human rights and extreme poverty. In her interim report (E/CN.4/1999/48), the independent expert recommended as steps to alleviate poverty the

universal ratification of relevant human rights instruments, a legal guarantee of minimum income, occupational reintegration programmes for the poorest of the poor, strengthening local authorities to develop local social welfare, the mobilization of sufficient resources to eradicate poverty, facilitating access to justice by ensuring that legal aid and legal counsel are available free of charge, combating corruption, and technical assistance with a special focus on training programmes for social workers, court officials and police forces.

68. The Office of the High Commissioner is endeavouring to increase coordination of human rights activities for the eradication of poverty, including those of the treaty bodies and relevant thematic mandates of the Commission on Human Rights and efforts by other organizations, notably those taking part in the Working Group on Poverty of the United Nations Development Group. On 30 and 31 August 1999, the Office organized initial consultations at Geneva on a possible draft declaration on human rights and extreme poverty. The Office will contribute to the implementation of the United Nations strategy for reducing by one half the proportion of people living in extreme poverty by 2015.

Chapter VI
Globalization and human rights

69. The liberalization of international trade, production and financial transactions, the increasing influence of global corporations and developments in information technology and communications — all components of the globalization process — are increasingly being considered from the perspective of their individual and collective impact on respect for human rights. The human rights organs of the United Nations system are increasingly addressing this issue. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1998 held a general day of discussion on the issue of globalization.

70. The Commission on Human Rights and the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights are analysing the impact of the process of globalization on the enjoyment of human rights and making recommendations to ensure that globalization does not hamper their enjoyment. In August 1999, the Subcommission appointed two of its members as special rapporteurs to undertake a study on the issue of globalization and its impact on the full enjoyment of all human rights, as recommended by the Commission.

71. In 1998, the Subcommission had established a sessional working group, *inter alia,* to examine the working methods and activities of transnational corporations and their effects on the enjoyment of civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights and the right to development. The working group met for the first time in August 1999, and recommended that the Subcommission consider, *inter alia,* developing a code of conduct for transnational corporations in order to ensure that their activities are in keeping with the promotion and protection of human rights; drafting and adopting mechanisms according to which host and home Governments would be obliged to elaborate internal legal monitoring standards in respect of the activities of transnational corporations; and analysing the possible liability of States and transnational corporations which fail to fulfil their obligations.

72. Also in 1998 the Subcommission had requested two of its members to prepare a working paper on human rights as the primary objective of international trade, investment and finance policy and practice. That working paper (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1999/11) recommended the establishment of a mechanism to carry out appropriate human rights impact assessments of the effects of the implementation of policy decisions made by multilateral institutions and intergovernmental organizations. It also recommended that treaty bodies and other human rights mechanisms should intensify their respective scrutiny of the processes taking place in the various multilateral institutions and the intergovernmental organizations that are involved in the matter.

73. In preparation for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, the Subcommission had decided, also in 1998, to entrust one of its members with preparing a working paper on globalization in the context of increased incidents of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia. This paper (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1999/8) encourages the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to consider the various aspects of globalization while examining the reports of States parties under the Convention. It also recommends that consideration be given to ways in which the various international human rights instruments can be applied to non-State actors with a critical role in the process of globalization and whose activities may, directly or indirectly, foster increasing incidents of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia.

74. The Secretary-General and the High Commissioner have emphasized the need to integrate human rights standards into the policies and activities of the various actors involved in the globalization of the world economy, particularly the international and regional financial institutions and the corporate sector. The proposal of the

Secretary-General to business leaders concerning a global compact of shared values in the areas of human rights, labour standards and the environment is taking shape through a joint Web site being developed by the Office of the Secretary-General in cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and the Office of the High Commissioner. The aim is to provide the corporate sector with information and resources by means of which United Nations standards can be incorporated into mission statements and management practices.

75. The High Commissioner has addressed the business community on the issue of corporate social responsibility at a number of recent events. On 10 June 1999, the High Commissioner addressed members of the international industry, trade and finance communities at WinConference 1999, organized by Winterthur Insurance International. On 1 July 1999, the High Commissioner gave the seventeenth Presidential Lecture at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich. On both occasions, the High Commissioner showed that human rights and the international economic order are inextricably linked.

Chapter VII
World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance

76. In its resolution 52/111 of 12 December 1997, the General Assembly decided to convene, not later than 2001, a World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. This decision reflected the international community's growing concern about the rise in incidents of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance, and its recognition of both the challenges of and the opportunities for combating them in an increasingly globalized world. The decision also demonstrates the determination of the international community to fight against these phenomena, which are aggravated by, *inter alia*, the inequitable distribution of wealth, marginalization and exclusion, which have a serious impact on the human rights of vulnerable groups, in particular migrant workers and their families, minorities and indigenous people. The World Conference will provide a unique opportunity for the international community to address the various forms of racism, racial discrimination, intolerance, ethnic antagonism and acts of violence that continue to affect millions of human beings, despite efforts to combat them.

77. The Office recognizes that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance have a devastating impact on the enjoyment of all human rights and are at the root of many of today's conflict situations. It thus assigns high priority to the World Conference and the preparatory conferences in order to ensure that the best conditions are in place for the international community to meet this important challenge and to adopt concrete and effective measures to eliminate phenomena that are an affront to all humanity. An ad hoc Conference secretariat has been established to assist in the preparatory process for the Conference and its follow-up.

78. The Preparatory Committee and the World Conference will have the important responsibility of examining the various dimensions of these phenomena in the light of the main objectives of the Conference, as set out by the General Assembly, and to formulate concrete and comprehensive proposals. It will also be their responsibility to focus on practical measures of prevention, education and legislation, as well as the provision of effective remedies to the victims of acts of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

79. In accordance with Commission on Human Rights resolution 1999/78, the Office has already undertaken a number of activities. Preparations are under way to convene a number of regional expert seminars for the World Conference on recourse procedures available for victims of racial discrimination, which would also make reference to best national practices in this area. These regional seminars will also examine the application of existing legislation and the possible need for new legislation to protect victims of racial discrimination from racist acts over the Internet. In addition, a questionnaire has been sent to States, specialized agencies and non-governmental organizations, requesting their views and suggestions for the World Conference and how they can most meaningfully participate in it.

80. Information relating to the World Conference is displayed prominently on the home page of the Web site of the Office. One can obtain from it most background documents on racism that have been prepared by the Office as well as documents that were submitted to the sessional open-ended working group which met during the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights to review and formulate proposals for the World Conference. Additional studies regarding the Internet as both a negative force to be regulated, and an educational tool to be promoted, are to be undertaken. The Department of Public Information and the Office of the High Commissioner are also working together on an information pamphlet that will be used in the world

campaign to be undertaken by the Department to promote the World Conference.

81. Concerning the question of the regional preparatory meetings, while the ultimate responsibility for such meetings lies with the States of the various regions, the Office has actively taken steps to facilitate the holding of regional meetings and will provide its expertise and assistance in that regard. At present, a regional preparatory meeting is being organized in Europe, the holding of a regional meeting of Latin American States in Brazil is being seriously considered, and OAU has taken a decision in principle to hold a regional meeting.

82. In order to achieve the objectives and to enable it to implement the decisions of the international community relating to the elimination of racism, the Office requires adequate human and financial resources which correspond to the importance of the challenge. An appeal was launched on 20 May 1999 to all States Members of the United Nations to help make the necessary resources available.

Chapter VIII
Indigenous people

83. The year 1999 represents the midpoint of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1995-2004), the goal of which is to strengthen international cooperation for the solution of problems faced by indigenous people in such areas as human rights, culture, the environment, development, education and health. The activities of the Office in the past year have taken place within the framework of the Decade.

84. One of the main objectives of the Decade is the adoption of the draft United Nations declaration on the rights of indigenous people and, in this respect, reference can be made to the ongoing discussions in the working group of the Commission on Human Rights established to elaborate the draft declaration. The establishment of a permanent forum for indigenous peoples within the United Nations system is another objective of the International Decade and, in February 1999, an open-ended ad hoc working group on a permanent forum for indigenous peoples was convened.

85. The education of indigenous people and non-indigenous societies concerning the situation, cultures, languages, rights and aspirations of indigenous people is another objective of the International Decade. In May 1999, a workshop for research and higher education institutions was organized in Costa Rica, which focused on indigenous issues in education, improving the exchange of information among such institutions, encouraging future cooperation, in consultation with indigenous people themselves and relevant United Nations bodies.

86. Despite a certain amount of progress being made, a great deal remains to be done during the second half of the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People.

87. The Working Group on Indigenous Populations met in July 1999, attracting an unprecedented number of close to 1,000 participants. The principal theme was "Indigenous peoples and their relationship to land". Another activity of relevance in the indigenous programme of the Office is the Indigenous Fellowship Programme, which is now in its third year. Four fellowships were awarded for this year's programme, which runs from 1 June to 30 November 1999, to indigenous persons from the Even people of Russia, the Aboriginal people of Australia, the Sami people of Sweden and the Biak people of Indonesia.

Chapter IX
Minorities

88. The integration of minority rights into the human rights procedures and mechanisms of the United Nations is of growing importance. The special rapporteurs on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions and on religious intolerance have been requested by the Commission on Human Rights to address the issue of minorities within their respective mandates and to pay special attention to violations of the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The possibilities of providing technical assistance for the implementation of the Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities and to establish effective links with minority organizations to further respect of the right to education are being studied. The Office will continue to work closely with the relevant agencies in the area of minority protection and will strengthen its activities and networks with minority groups and minority representatives at the national level.

89. At the regional level, closer links are being established with regional organizations with a view to streamlining activities in the area of minority protection, especially with the Office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities of OSCE. Special attention is being given to issues pertaining to minority protection within the framework of regional human rights strategies as a means of providing adequate responses to situations which may vary from one region to another. At the national level, the High Commissioner has personally addressed relevant issues in

her dialogue with Governments during visits to countries, and has drawn their attention to recommendations adopted by treaty bodies after their examination of the reports of States parties.

Chapter X
Gender issues and the human rights of women

90. A workshop on integrating a gender perspective into the United Nations human rights system was organized in May 1999 by the Office of the High Commissioner, in collaboration with the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM). The workshop brought together the human rights special procedures (special rapporteurs, representatives of the Secretary-General and members of working groups) and the chairpersons of the treaty bodies. The workshop resulted in a set of detailed recommendations on how the special procedures mechanisms and the treaty bodies can integrate gender issues and the human rights of women into their procedures.

91. During the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights, the Office organized a panel discussion with the Chairs of the Commission on Human Rights and the Commission on the Status of Women, the Vice-Chair of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women and the High Commissioner for Human Rights as panel moderator, as a parallel activity to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and to strengthen the connection between the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and the Commission on Human Rights in reinforcing the promotion and protection of the rights of women.

92. The Office is preparing a work plan on gender issues and the human rights of women which emphasizes development of an internal capacity in this regard. A policy statement on gender mainstreaming and the human rights of women has been finalized.

93. The field offices of the Office of the High Commissioner are increasingly dealing with gender issues within a human rights framework. For example, the office in Bosnia and Herzegovina has a mandate which deals primarily with the issues of gender, discrimination, protection of minority rights and the rule of law, with a particular focus on social and economic rights. Further, a briefing session on gender integration into human rights activities was organized for the field presences in the context of their annual meeting. A draft checklist on gender integration into human rights activities is available. During the fifty-first session of the Subcommission on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights, the Office co-sponsored a panel on regional challenges five years after the Fourth World Conference on Women. A Web site on gender mainstreaming and the human rights of women is being established for internal use.

94. The Office will be focusing attention on the integration of gender and the human rights of women into all mechanisms, activities and programmes of the United Nations system; the strengthening of gender issues in the human rights mechanisms and field activities; appointing women as heads of field operations; developing guidelines and training materials in support of the integration of gender and women's rights; enhancing partnerships among the various components of the United Nations human rights mechanisms, as well as United Nations bodies, Government and civil society, in sharing a common framework for the integration of gender and the promotion and protection of women's human rights. Indicators will be developed to assess the progress made in integrating gender into human rights activities and to success stories will be disseminated.

Chapter XI
Other issues

A. Trafficking

95. The growing trade in human beings, in particular women and children, is of great concern to the Office of the High Commissioner. Trafficking involves some of the most serious violations of human rights, making it today's form of slavery. In late 1998, it was decided to assign high priority to the issue of trafficking. Concrete steps, including the allocation of additional human and financial resources, have been taken to implement this decision. The work of the Office in this area is based on two fundamental principles: first, that human rights must be at the core of any credible anti-trafficking strategy and, second, that such strategies must be developed and implemented from the perspective of those who most need their human rights protected and promoted.

96. Action taken by the Office in the area of trafficking is currently taking place on two fronts. First, the Office

continues to enhance the quality of its servicing and support to the relevant mechanisms dealing with trafficking and related issues. These include the Special Rapporteur on violence against women and the Working Group on Contemporary Forms of Slavery, both of which are dealing with the specific issue of trafficking in 1999. The United Nations Trust Fund on Contemporary Forms of Slavery has recently received significant new contributions which will enable it to provide a substantial number of grants to non-governmental organizations and individuals involved in the fight against trafficking.

97. Second, a specific anti-trafficking programme has been developed. Its objective is to work towards the integration of human rights into international, regional and national anti-trafficking initiatives. Emphasis is on legal and policy development. The programme does not aim to undertake large-scale projects or to otherwise duplicate the excellent initiatives that are being undertaken elsewhere. Instead, as far as possible, the Office tries to act as a catalyst for and support the work of others. At the international level, attention has been focused on two draft protocols which are being developed in the context of the draft convention against transnational organized crime (trafficking in persons, and smuggling of migrants). An analysis of the two draft protocols (A/AC.254/16) was undertaken and the progress made in their drafting will be followed closely.

98. At the regional and subregional levels, the Office is undertaking a number of initiatives, including a joint project with the Council of Europe focusing on preventive activities for Central and Eastern Europe; a range of activities in the former Yugoslavia coordinated by the human rights office in Sarajevo; and a joint project with UNDP in Nepal focusing on the legal and judicial aspects of controlling trafficking. The Office has examined the draft convention against trafficking in women and girls of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and submitted views to the heads of State or Government of the SAARC member countries. The Office is also working to encourage the national human rights commissions of the Asian and Pacific region to take up the issue of trafficking, and these efforts will be extended to national institutions in other regions.

B. Rights of the child

99. The year 1999 marks the tenth anniversary of the adoption by the General Assembly of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and represents an important opportunity to review the achievements and remaining challenges to guaranteeing the rights of all children. The High Commissioner has taken a number of initiatives to sponsor or suggest events during which special emphasis can be given to protecting the rights of the child. These activities are within the ongoing process of protecting child rights and will be undertaken in cooperation with the Committee on the Rights of the Child, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and other organizations, and within the framework of the review of the World Summit for Children which is to be undertaken in 2001.

100. The Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-fifth session, held a special dialogue on the rights of the child which focused on the marginalization and exclusion of children and sought to go beyond the Commission's own agenda and examine issues which had an impact on the rights of children but were dealt with in other forums. Statements during the special dialogue were made by the Chairperson of the Commission, the High Commissioner for Human Rights, the Director-General of ILO, the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF, the representative of the World Health Organization, the Secretary-General of the Swedish non-governmental organization Rädda Barnen, representatives of 20 Governments, 7 non-governmental organizations and the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Cambodia.

101. The special dialogue considered statistical and other information about child mortality and child labour which showed the extreme situation of many children in the world. Poverty is widespread and the negative effects of macroeconomic policies on children were very important and had to be taken into consideration by policy makers. Questions of trade, debt and development policies were essential elements when looking at child rights. Importance was also given to finding meaningful ways of involving children in the work of the Commission. Other issues discussed were education, HIV/AIDS, children in conflict situations, sexual abuse and discrimination and Governments were urged to move child rights to a higher place on the list of national and international priorities.

102. The Coordinating Committee of national institutions, at its meeting held in April 1999, recognized that the rights of the child should be a priority area for national institutions and discussed a number of specific issues in that regard. It also recognized the need to exchange best practices in protecting children's rights and suggested that a two-day workshop on the rights of the child be held in conjunction with the fourth Annual Meeting of the Asia-Pacific Forum of National Human Rights Institutions, to be held in Manila. The workshop, which discussed the role of national institutions in the promotion and protection of the human

rights of children, was held on 9 and 10 September 1999 in Manila. Further activities will be considered to follow up on the results of the meeting of the Coordinating Committee.

103. A high-level segment discussion on the rights of the child was organized during the substantive session of 1999 of the Economic and Social Council. The Secretary-General, the President of the Council, the Executive Director of UNICEF and others participated, as did children from Colombia and other countries, who spoke to the session about their perceptions of how their rights were or were not respected. Further, the Committee on the Rights of the Child, together with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and UNICEF, organized, on 29 September and 1 October 1999, a workshop on the theme "Convention on the Rights of the Child: a decade of achievements and challenges", in order to assess the impact of the Convention after 10 years, both at the national and at the international level, and to design recommendations to strengthen its implementation in the future. On 20 November, the anniversary of the adoption of the Convention by the General Assembly, a ceremony will be held at Geneva with the participation of children from some 40 countries, who will present to the High Commissioner and the Deputy Executive Director of UNICEF the results of their work in looking at the articles of the Convention from their own points of view.

104. Juvenile justice constitutes one of the main challenges for the implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The Committee on the Rights of the Child and other human rights mechanisms have systematically noted their concerns and made recommendations in this area. The High Commissioner has decided to focus attention on the issue of juvenile justice, possibly through the organization of a major international conference in 2002.

105. Information presented to the special dialogue on the rights of the child held during the fifty-fifth session of the Commission on Human Rights and several academic studies point to a distinct relationship between policies in the areas of development strategies, structural adjustment, trade, monetary and fiscal issues, the labour market etc., and the enjoyment of rights by children. Economic policies are not child-neutral. Rather, they are often child unfriendly, principally because they are child-blind, in that the necessary data on the impact of policies on children are not available and policy makers do not focus on that impact.

106. Different policies can have very different effects on children and their rights. Experience has shown that even very poor countries or regions can achieve much progress, assessed by key indicators of children's well-being. This increasing understanding that economic policy does have a direct impact on the rights of the child means that policy makers have the real possibility of designing and implementing policies that reinforce the rights of the child and, at the same time, promote long-term economic and social development.

107. It will be important now to engage national and international economic policy bodies in this debate and to refine our tools of analysis. As a step in this direction, the High Commissioner brought this issue to the attention of the Executive Committee on Economic and Social Affairs in May 1999 and to the Manila workshop on the rights of the child mentioned above.

C. Databases and Web site

108. Significant achievements have been made in the use of information technology for public information and information management purposes since the report submitted to the General Assembly at its fifty-third session. Four databases are operational and have approximately 20,000 user sessions a week. The Office of the High Commissioner is taking part in discussions with other international organizations in order to set up joint Web sites on issues such as development, humanitarian issues and peace-building.[5]

Chapter XII
Conclusions

109. The past year has been marked by widespread and systematic violations of the most basic human rights. Carefully planned and executed programmes of ethnic cleansing and violations have killed and displaced many thousands of people. Violent conflicts have inflicted untold suffering on millions of people and violations of human rights are the root causes of those conflicts. A first priority as we enter the next century will be for the international community to find ways of acting effectively in response to the very clear warnings of impending disasters, such as those that have preceded today's conflicts.

110. Reports are received daily by the Office of the High Commissioner of numerous and very serious violations of human rights. These are addressed by the special procedures, the complaint mechanisms of the treaty bodies and the Commission on Human Rights. These mechanisms must become more effective as an early warning system, with the measure of their success being how well they respond to the needs of the victims.

111. Less visible — but nonetheless destructive — violations of human rights are the growth of poverty in rich and developing countries alike, and the marginalization caused by violations of economic, social and cultural rights. The situation of children in the world, the impact of armed conflict on children, the economic, sexual and other exploitation of children, and their marginalization and growing poverty in the midst of wealth have been characterized as a curse. Responses are being developed through the human rights and development work of UNDP, the World Bank, FAO, UNICEF and other organs and programmes of the United Nations system.

112. In spite of all the obstacles and dangers, people continue to demand that their human rights be respected. This is a driving force for the future as human rights becomes a crucial benchmark of success for Governments, institutions and all sectors of society. The Secretary-General has called for the next century to be the "Century of Human Rights", and for the effective prevention of conflicts. As the work on macroeconomics and the rights of the child has shown, institutions will increasingly be held responsible for the human rights consequences of their policies. At an international level, this means that actors such as the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization will have to play a greater role in the human rights and development debate.

113. Prevention is the most effective means of ensuring human rights protection. Prevention is now the main focus of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and ought to be the main focus of all human rights actors, whether they be States, transnational corporations, international financial institutions or agencies of the United Nations system. Strengthening our preventive mechanisms is an urgent necessity as we enter a new century.

114. The imperative to convert rhetoric into action is central to the human rights debate. It is particularly acute in the case of the right to development, where the vital question is how that right can be implemented on the ground. The context of this issue has changed greatly over the past decade; there have been dramatic alterations in the geopolitical landscape with the ending of super-Power rivalry and the emergence of numerous new States. Globalization is an increasingly important phenomenon, bringing with it both new dangers and new opportunities. There has been a fundamental shift in attitudes towards human rights, also, with a growing recognition of the fundamental dignity of the human person and the centrality of human rights to all of the issues of global governance: humanitarian affairs, peace and security, economic and social affairs and, above all, development.

115. Looking back at what has been achieved in the twentieth century, and looking forward to what lies ahead, it is clear that human rights have taken centre stage in much of today's political and ethical debates. It is fitting that this final report to the General Assembly before the dawn of a new millennium reiterate some of the difficulties confronted in the protection of human rights.

116. The attainment of universal human rights and the transformation of the twenty-first century into an age of prevention are goals that are achievable — if the will and the courage to meet the challenge exist. Significant advances have been made in the legislative and normative field. Worldwide acceptance has been building for the principle that human rights are universal and indivisible. Flowing from the Universal Declaration of Human Rights has come an impressive body of human rights treaties, conventions, covenants and declarations, including the two major International Covenants on Civil and Political Rights and on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. These achievements are impressive, especially when it is remembered that most have been put in place within the past half century. The challenge is to put this impressive array of legislation into practical effect. We are at the stage where we must move from standard-setting to putting the principles of the international treaties into practice.

117. The United Nations can only function effectively if its Member States give it sustained support and provide the resources needed to do the job. There are many areas in which the political will and the resources provided are not adequate for the task. And there are many urgent conflict and country situations where the world's attention is at best sporadic, at worst uncaring.

118. On the positive side, the mechanisms of the United Nations for the promotion and protection of human rights are expanding and improving. The fact that the tough, core issues of human rights are now being hotly debated is proof that human rights have come of age. These issues must be faced with courage. It is one thing to champion human rights in theory; it is another to take the difficult choices that put them into effect.

119. There is strong support for human rights; among the public support has never been stronger. That places the responsibility on those who care about human rights to deliver results that match the hopes and ideals of peoples. It is from this perspective, namely, the responsibility of respecting, promoting, protecting and fulfilling all human rights, that this last report of the millennium is submitted to the General Assembly in the hope of a new era of peace, human rights and prosperity for all peoples. The strong plea of the High Commission is: let us, in the coming century,

prevent gross violations of human rights, economic, social and cultural as well as civil and political rights.

Notes

[1] The Human Rights Committee reviews the implementation of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Second Optional Protocol thereto, and administers the first Optional Protocol. The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights reviews the implementation of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The Committee against Torture reviews the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination reviews the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women reviews the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. The Committee on the Rights of the Child reviews the Convention on the Rights of the Child. A seventh human rights treaty adopted by the General Assembly envisions the establishment of a treaty body for the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families, when that treaty enters into force.

[2] The Representative of the Secretary-General for Cambodia, and the independent expert on the situation of human rights in Somalia.

[3] Further information on the activities of the national institutions programme for the period 1998-1999 is provided in the report of the Secretary-General on national institutions for promotion and protection of human rights (A/54/336).

[4] Reference is made in this respect to the interim report of the High Commissioner to the open-ended Working Group on the Right to Development at its first session (E/CN.4/1999/WG.18/3) which lists the most recent initiatives and activities of the Office.

[5] Further information on the use of electronic means for public information purposes is available in the report of the Secretary-General to the General Assembly on the United Nations Decade for Human Rights Education, 1995-2004, and public information activities in the field of human rights (A/54/399 and Add.1).

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